



red-winged blackbird

Agelaius phoeniceus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Passeriformes
Family:	Emberizidae

Features

An adult red-winged blackbird is 7 1/2 to 9 1/2 inches long. The male is black, except for red patches on each wing that are bordered in yellow. The female has a brown body with tan stripes. The bill is sharply pointed.

Natural History

The red-winged blackbird lives in marshes, swamps, ditches, cultivated land, or hay fields. It eats insects and seeds. Its call is "konk-a-reeee" or "o-ka-leeee." These birds form huge roosts in winter. Males begin arriving as early as February in their spring migration. Females arrive later, in early April. Nesting occurs in clover fields, ditches, marshes, cultivated fields, and wood edges during May through July. The cuplike nest is built close to or on the ground. Three to five light brown, to white, to pale blue eggs with black marks are laid. Cowbirds are known to parasitize red-winged blackbird nests, leaving an egg that will hatch into a young cowbird that the blackbirds will feed and care for. Fall migration begins in October. The red-

winged blackbird is one of Iowa's most abundant birds.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; wet prairies and fens

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

summer: statewide; migrant: statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.